

Assessing the Relationship between School Culture and Student Empowerment: Basis for Students' Transformational Leadership Program

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Abstract: This study evaluated the relationship between the school's culture and its commitment to student empowerment, which served as the foundation for the students' transformational leadership program and other school-wide activities that focused on student empowerment. The researcher utilized a descriptive, comparative correlational approach, with the objective of obtaining a thorough comprehension of the associations among school culture, empowerment of college students for transformational leadership, and the efficacy of leadership training programs and was participated by was participated by the 543 students from Changsha University of Science and Technology, Hunan University of Science and Technology, Central South University of Forestry and Technology, Shaoyang University, and Hunan Communication Polytechnic. The study shows that female education students influence insights, with significant differences in perceptions of the school's leadership initiatives based on sex, academic program, and grade level, emphasizing the need for a more tailored approach; a strong correlation between empowerment efforts and school culture highlights the importance of further strengthening these initiatives, especially for Chinese students. The researcher recommends to develop targeted, culturally relevant leadership programs that address the needs of female students, diverse demographics, and Chinese students, while strengthening and embedding these initiatives into the school's culture to ensure they are inclusive, effective, and impactful.

Keywords: School Culture; Student Empowerment; Student Transformational Leadership Program.

1. Introduction

The training of transformational leadership qualities among college students, particularly within the context of the Chinese educational system, has become an increasingly important in today's world, which is characterized by fast change and global interconnection. It has been widely acknowledged that transformational leadership, which is distinguished by its capacity to inspire and motivate individuals to accomplish extraordinary achievements, is a crucial driver of both the success of organizations and the growth of society (Northouse, 2021). The cultivation of visionary and innovative leaders who are capable of navigating complex challenges and driving positive change is necessary for the cultivation of transformational leadership among Chinese students (Wang, 2020; Avolio et al., 2019). This is because the country's ongoing economic development, technological advancement, and expanding role on the world stage necessitate the cultivation of such leaders.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the significance of transformational leadership is widely acknowledged, Chinese students frequently face a wide range of difficulties and roadblocks on their path to developing their leadership skills. Some of these barriers may include cultural norms that place an emphasis on compliance and obedience to authority, restricted access to leadership opportunities and resources, and the temptation to prioritize academic accomplishment over involvement in extracurricular activities (Li & Leung, 2018). Students may experience difficulty in combining traditional Chinese values with modern leadership concepts, which further complicates the process of leadership development for these students.

For the purpose of addressing these issues and encouraging

the growth of transformational leadership among Chinese students, it is vital to investigate the relationship between student empowerment, school culture, and the development of leadership skills. Students are able to realize their leadership potential and make meaningful contributions to their communities when they are empowered, which is defined as the process of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and resources to exert control over their lives and effect positive change (Kanungo, 2018). Empowerment plays a critical role in enabling students to realize their potential as leaders and create positive change in their communities. Furthermore, the school culture, which includes the values, norms, and practices that are present inside educational institutions, has a significant impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities for leadership development that students have.

Significant insights into the theoretical underpinnings, dimensions, and results of transformational leadership are revealed by a comprehensive study of the existing literature on the topic of leaders who transform organizations. Transformational leadership can be defined by four fundamental components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and customized consideration. These components are essential to the success of transformational leadership. The overarching objective of transformational leadership is to motivate and enable followers to go beyond their own self-interest and work towards achievement of a shared vision and objectives. These dimensions are in line with this objective.

Furthermore, transformative leadership has been shown to have good benefits on a variety of organizational outcomes, such as employee happiness, commitment, and performance (Avolio et al., 2018). These findings have been confirmed by

empirical investigations. On the other hand, there is still a dearth of research that expressly focuses on the development of transformational leadership among college students, particularly within the setting of China. The fact that there is a gap in the existing literature highlights the necessity of conducting additional research into the role that student empowerment and school culture play in the development of transformational leadership skills and characteristics among Chinese students.

This research is significant because it has the ability to fill in some of the gaps that have been identified in previous research and to provide insights into educational approaches that are targeted at fostering leadership development among Chinese students. This research has the potential to provide educators, administrators, and policymakers with valuable insights that can be used to create supportive learning environments that are conducive to leadership excellence. This is accomplished by elucidating the relationship between student empowerment, school culture, and transformational leadership. Furthermore, this study has the potential to help to the development of focused interventions and activities that are aimed at cultivating the next generation of visionary and effective leaders in China and beyond. This goal can be accomplished by addressing the problems and barriers that students experience while attempting to achieve leadership positions.

2. Statement of the Problem

The study aims to assess the relationship between the school culture and student empowerment to be the basis for students' transformational leadership program. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

(1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:

- 1) sex
- 2) academic program
- 3) grade level

(2) What is the assessment of student-respondents regarding the school's initiatives aimed at empowering students in terms of:

- 1) Visionary Thinking
- 2) Self-awareness
- 3) Empathy
- 4) Ethical Leadership
- 5) Inclusive and Collaborative Leadership
- 6) Peer Mentoring

(3) Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents of the institutions' efforts towards empowering students for transformational leadership when they are grouped according to profile?

(4) What is the assessment of the student-respondents of the school culture toward student empowerment in terms of:

- 1) Inclusive and Supportive Environment
- 2) Participative Student Voice
- 3) High Expectations for Success
- 4) Emphasis on Collaboration and Teamwork
- 5) Ethical and Values-Based Education
- 6) Organizational Modeling

(5) Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents of the school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership among students when they are grouped according to profile?

(6) Is there a significant relationship between the institutions' efforts towards empowering students and school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership

among students?

(7) Based on the results of the study, what transformational leadership training can be designed to nurture and develop transformational leadership among Chinese students?

3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents of the institutions' efforts towards empowering students for transformational leadership when they are grouped according to profile

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents of the school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership among students when they are grouped according to profile.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between the institutions' efforts towards empowering students and school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership among students.

4. Scope and Delimitation

The scope of this research includes a descriptive, comparative, and correlational analysis of the relationship between school culture, college student empowerment for transformational leadership, and the effectiveness of leadership training programs. The study, which focuses on college students from five universities in China's Changsha province, uses stratified sampling to assure representation across numerous demographic characteristics. The key goals include measuring students' opinions of institutional initiatives to equip them for transformational leadership and evaluating the school culture's involvement in cultivating such leadership characteristics. Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate potential changes in judgments based on demographic factors such as gender, academic program, and grade level. Furthermore, it tries to study the relationship between students' perceptions of institutional empowerment efforts and school culture, with the goal of identifying areas for improvement in leadership development programs.

However, several limits must be recognized. To begin, the study's conclusions may be limited in generalizability due to the small sample size and the distinctiveness of the universities chosen in Changsha region. Although attempts will be taken to guarantee representativeness, exercise caution when extrapolating results to larger populations or regions. Second, relying on self-reported data from student respondents raises the likelihood of bias, which may impair the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Mitigation techniques, such as cautious questionnaire design and data collection procedures, will be used to address this issue. Furthermore, the study's focus on Changsha province may limit the findings' applicability to other cultural contexts or educational systems. Cultural beliefs, educational policies, and leadership methods may all influence the study's results.

Finally, resource restrictions such as time, financing, and participant access may have an impact on the scope and depth of the study. Efforts to mitigate these limits through careful planning and resource management will be critical to the study's rigor and validity. Despite these constraints, the study aims to provide useful insights into empowering college students for transformative leadership in the context of Chinese higher education.

5. Research Design

The selected research design for this study is a descriptive, comparative correlational approach, with the objective of obtaining a thorough comprehension of the associations among school culture, empowerment of college students for transformational leadership, and the efficacy of leadership training programs. The study aims to thoroughly document and describe the current situation of these variables within the educational setting of five institutions in Changsha province, China, using a descriptive methodology. Through the process of watching and analyzing these factors in their natural state, researchers are able to create a comprehensive understanding of the current conditions and practices that influence students' experiences in developing leadership skills.

Moreover, the comparative nature of the research design enables a thorough examination of distinctions and resemblances among the chosen colleges. The study can identify patterns, trends, and discrepancies among institutions by comparing different aspects of school culture, leadership training programs, and students' perspectives. The comparative analysis plays a crucial role in identifying both strengths and areas for improvement, thereby informing the development of focused interventions and attempts to disseminate best practices.

The incorporation of correlational analysis within the research design facilitates the examination of the associations among various variables of interest. This study investigates the interplay and impact of school culture, empowerment initiatives, and students' conceptions of transformational leadership on students' experiences of leadership development. The comprehensive comprehension of interconnections presented herein provides significant perspectives for educational professionals and policymakers in formulating efficacious leadership development endeavors. The emphasis placed on description, comparison, and correlation is in accordance with the imperative to comprehend the present condition of leadership development methods, evaluate disparities among institutions, and investigate connections among crucial variables. Furthermore, positioned within the framework of Chinese higher education in the Changsha province, this research methodology enables the investigation of these factors within their cultural and educational environment, yielding findings that are specific to the context. These findings can then be utilized to develop targeted interventions and initiatives that aim to cultivate transformational leadership among college students.

6. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents as to sex, academic program, and grade level. Data reveals that majority of the respondents are female with 59.9% while male has 40.1%. This means that the university is dominantly composed of female students. Women have held an advantage over men in university enrollment rates, the proportion of female university students in China surpassed that of male students, as affirmed by Xu et al., (2023) the proportion of female students had increased and resulting in more women than men enrolled at the university level.

Furthermore, most of them are taking "Education" with 50.6% while the least takes "Health Sciences" with 0.9%. This implies that one of the most in-demand courses in universities in China is education. According to Teast (2024), China's economy continues to grow and the demand for

proficiency increases to enhance career prospects, the need for teachers has surged. Furthermore, the salaries for teachers in China are typically sufficient to ensure a comfortable quality of life.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	218	40.1
Female	325	59.9
Total	543	100.0
ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Humanities and Social Sciences	20	3.7
Natural Sciences	14	2.6
Engineering and Technology	131	24.1
Health Sciences	5	.9
Business and Management	11	2.0
Arts and Design	87	16.0
Education	275	50.6
Total	543	100.0
GRADE LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Freshmen	362	66.7
Sophomore	86	15.8
Junior	46	8.5
Senior	49	9.0
Total	543	100.0

Moreover, majority of the respondents are comprised with "Freshmen" with 66.7% while the least are "Junior" with 8.5%. It is noted that majority of the freshman students are more eager to participate in studies. As affirmed by Barns (2021), when transitioning to college, freshmen too proactive approach to achieve success in both their academic careers and future endeavors that is why they are eager to expand their knowledge by participating in different researches.

Table 2 displays the assessment of the student respondents regarding the school's initiatives aimed at empowering students as to visionary thinking. All indicators are interpreted as to "Agree/Moderately Observable" with a composite mean of 3.28 and SD of 0.50. The highest-ranked indicator, "The educational institution fosters a culture that promotes creative thinking and the generation of innovative solutions to address societal concerns" (with a mean of 3.35 and standard deviation of 0.56), means that the institution cultivates an environment that encourages students to think creatively and develop innovative approaches to societal issues however indicate a moderate alignment with the institution's goals of nurturing socially responsible and forward-thinking individuals.

The second-highest indicator, "Our institution's leadership programs serve as a source of inspiration for students, motivating them to establish ambitious objectives and engage in innovative pursuits" (with a mean of 3.30 and standard deviation of 0.60), reinforces this by highlighting the institution's success in inspiring students through its leadership programs. These programs appear to be moderately effective in encouraging students to aim high and pursue innovative goals and interpreted as to "Agree/Moderately Observable".

Table 2. Assessment of the Student Respondents regarding the School’s Initiatives Aimed at Empowering Students as to Visionary Thinking

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	INTERPRETATION	RANK
1. The educational institution fosters a culture that promotes creative thinking and the generation of innovative solutions to address societal concerns.	3.35	0.56	Agree/Moderately Observable	1
2. Our institution's leadership programs serve as a source of inspiration for students, motivating them to establish ambitious objectives and engage in innovative pursuits.	3.30	0.60	Agree/Moderately Observable	2
3. The faculty members at my university cultivate a culture that highly esteems progressive and visionary viewpoints.	3.29	0.56	Agree/Moderately Observable	3
4. I am empowered by my institution to investigate unorthodox concepts and engage in innovative thinking.	3.27	0.60	Agree/Moderately Observable	7
5. The educational institution offers students the chance to engage in initiatives that foster a long-term perspective and strategic decision-making.	3.28	0.58	Agree/Moderately Observable	5
6. The curriculum implemented at my educational institution fosters an environment that promotes critical thinking and encourages students to explore novel perspectives.	3.28	0.59	Agree/Moderately Observable	5
7. At my educational institution, students are actively pushed to visualize their prospective positions as catalysts for change and as leaders within their particular domains.	3.26	0.57	Agree/Moderately Observable	8
8. The environment at my school promotes risk-taking and creativity in order to achieve ambitious goals.	3.26	0.60	Agree/Moderately Observable	9
9. My institution's leadership development initiatives prioritize the significance of formulating a captivating vision for the future.	3.24	0.56	Agree/Moderately Observable	10
10. I posit that my educational institution provides students with the requisite skills and mentality essential for cultivating visionary leadership abilities.	3.28	0.57	Agree/Moderately Observable	5
Composite Mean	3.28	0.50	Agree/Moderately Observable	

LEGEND: STRONGLY AGREE/HIGHLY OBSERVABLE (4) =3.51-4.0); AGREE/MODERATELY OBSERVABLE (3) =2.51-3.50); DISAGREE/SLIGHTLY OBSERVABLE (2) =1.51-2.50); STRONGLY DISAGREE/NOT OBSERVABLE (1) =1.0-1.50).

Conversely, the lower-ranked indicators, "The environment at my school promotes risk-taking and creativity in order to achieve ambitious goals" (with a mean of 3.26 and standard deviation of 0.60), and "My institution's leadership development initiatives prioritize the significance of formulating a captivating vision for the future" (with a mean of 3.24 and standard deviation of 0.56), while still agreeing that these aspects are “Agree/Moderately Observable”, indicate areas where the institution may need to focus more. This reveals that the institution does promote risk-taking and visionary thinking, these areas might must be strongly emphasized and must effectively implemented as others. Strengthening these aspects could further enhance the institution’s ability to cultivate leaders who are not only innovative but also willing to take the necessary risks to achieve their ambitious goals.

It is noted that the institution is moderately effective in fostering a culture of creative thinking and innovative problem-solving, particularly regarding societal issues, which is reflected in its leadership programs that inspire students to set high aspirations and in nurturing socially responsible and innovative graduates however there is slightly lower emphasis on promoting risk-taking and the formulation of a captivating vision within leadership development indicates

areas for growth. This maybe because academic institutions often operate in environments that are risk-averse, valuing stability, predictability, and evidence-based decision-making. This cultural tendency can lead to less emphasis on encouraging students to take risks, particularly in leadership contexts where failure can have significant consequences. As a result, students may be less exposed to opportunities where they can practice and develop risk-taking behaviors. According to Awodiji et al., (2024), while students are encouraged to innovate, they may not be fully supported in taking necessary risks or developing strategic foresight, which are crucial for effective leadership.

Continous strengthening these aspects could enhance the institution’s ability to produce leaders who are not only innovative but also bold and visionary, better preparing them to navigate and shape the complexities of the modern world. It is essential that the institution intensifies more of its efforts to encourage risk-taking and visionary thinking within its leadership programs. By incorporating more opportunities for students to engage in calculated risks and emphasizing the importance of long-term strategic vision, the institution can better prepare students to become bold and innovative leaders capable of addressing complex challenges in the modern world.

7. Conclusion

Based on the summary of findings, the following conclusions were formulated:

(1)The majority of respondents shows that the insights and perspectives gathered are primarily influenced by the experiences of female education students, particularly those at the beginning of their academic journey. This could indicate a need for targeted interventions or programs that address the unique needs and challenges of this group, ensuring that empowerment initiatives are appropriately tailored.

(2)The student respondents assessed the school's initiatives aimed at empowering students—focusing on visionary thinking, self-awareness, empathy, ethical leadership, inclusive and collaborative leadership, and peer mentoring—as “Agree/Moderately Observable” within the academic institution. This implies that while the institution's efforts are recognized, there is a need for further strengthening and embedding these initiatives within the school culture to ensure that all students can more clearly observe and benefit from these leadership development opportunities.

(3)There is a significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents regarding the institution's efforts to empower students for transformational leadership based on sex, academic program, and grade level.

(4)This finding highlights the presence of diverse perceptions and experiences among students, which may be influenced by their gender, academic focus, and stage of study. It underscores the need for a more differentiated and inclusive approach to leadership empowerment, ensuring that programs are equitable and effective across all demographic groups.

(5)Student respondents assessed the school culture towards student empowerment-considering factors like an inclusive and supportive environment, participative student voice, high expectations for success, emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, ethical and values-based education, and organizational modeling-as “Agree/Moderately Observable” in the academic institution. This indicates that the school culture is perceived as supportive of transformational leadership to a moderate extent. However, there may be room for growth in making these cultural aspects more pronounced and deeply rooted in the daily experiences of students, further reinforcing the school's commitment to empowerment and leadership development.

(6)There is a significant difference in the assessment of the student-respondents regarding the school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership among students based on sex, academic program, and grade level. Students from different backgrounds and academic contexts perceive the school culture differently, which may affect their engagement with and benefit from leadership development initiatives.

(7)There is a very strong positive correlation between the institution's efforts towards empowering students and the school culture that nurtures and develops transformational leadership among students. This strong correlation implies that the effectiveness of student empowerment initiatives is closely linked to the overall school culture.

(8)The need to design a transformational leadership training program specifically to nurture and develop transformational leadership among Chinese students must be considered.

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